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The Thirty-nine Steps

By JOHN BUCHAN

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(Continued.)

"My name's Alexander Trumple, and I've been seven years at the trade and twenty afore that herdin' on Lei then water. My friends ca' me Ecky and whiles Specky, for I wear glasses, bein' weak in the sight. Jus' you speak the surveyor fair and ca' him sir, and he'll be fell pleased. I'll be back or middy."

I borrowed his spectacles and filthy old hat; stripped off coat, waistcoat and collar and gave him them to carry home; borrowed, too, the foul stump of a clay pipe as an extra prop.

He indicated my simple task and without more ado set off at an amble bedward. Bed may have been his chief object, but I think there was also something left in the foot of a bottle. I prayed that he might be safe under cover before my friends arrived on the scene.

Then I set to work to dress for the part.

I opened the collar of my shirt—it was a vulgar blue and white check

I took up the barrow and began my journey to and from the quarry, such as plowmen wear—and revealed a neck as brown as my linker's. I rolled up my sleeves, and there was a forearm that might have been a blacksmith's—sunburnt and rough with old scars. I got my boots and trousers legs all white from the dust of the road and hitched up my trousers, tying them with string below the knee.

Then I set to work on my face. With a handful of dust I made a watermark round my neck—the place where Mr. Trumple's Sunday ablutions might be expected to stop. I rubbed a good deal of dirt also into the sunburn of my cheeks. A roadman's eyes would, no doubt, be a little inflamed, so I contrived to get some dust in both of mine, and by dint of vigorous rubbing produced a bleary effect.

The sandwiches Sir Harry had given me had gone off with my coat, but the roadman's lunch, tied in a red handkerchief, was at my disposal.

I ate with great relish several of the thick slabs of scones and cheese and

drank a little of the cold tea. In the handkerchief was a local paper tied with string and addressed to Mr. Turnbull—obviously meant to solace his midday leisure. I did up the bundle again and put the paper conspicuously beside it.

My boots did not satisfy me, but by dint of kicking among the stones I reduced them to the granite-like surface which characterizes a roadman's footgear. Then I bit and scraped my finger nails till the edges were all cracked and uneven. The men I was matched against would miss no detail.

I broke one of the boot laces and re-tied it in a clumsy knot and loosed the

newspaper lying beside Turnbull's bundle.

"I see you get your papers in good time," he said.

I glanced at it casually. "Aye, in good time. Seem that that paper came out last Saturday, I'm just fower days late."

He picked it up, glanced at the superscription and laid it down again. One of the others had been looking at my boots, and a word in German called the speaker's attention to them.

"You've a fine taste in boots," he said. "Those were never made by a country shoemaker."

"They were not," I said readily. "They were made in London. I got them frae the gentleman that was here last year for the shootin'. What was his name now?" And I scratched a forgetful head.

Again the sleek one spoke in German. "Let us get on," he said. "This fellow is all right."

They asked one last question: "Did you see any one pass early this morning? He might be on a bicycle or he might be on foot."

I very nearly fell into the trap and told a story of a bicyclist hurrying past in the gray dawn. But I had the sense to see my danger. I pretended to consider very deeply.

"I wasn't up very early," I said. "Ye see my dochter was merrie last night and we kept it up late. I opened the house door about seven—and there was naeboddy on the road then. Since I can up here there has been just the baker and the Ruchill herd, besides you gentlemen."

One of them gave me a cigar, which I smelled gingerly and stuck in Turnbull's bundle. They got into their car

and were out of sight in three minutes. My heart leaped with an enormous relief, and I went on wheeling my stones. It was as well, for ten minutes later the car returned—one of the occupants waving a hand to me. These gentry left nothing to chance.

I finished Turnbull's bread and cheese, and pretty soon I had finished the stones. The next step was what puzzled me.

I could not keep up this road making business for long. A merciful Providence had kept Mr. Turnbull indoors, but if he appeared on the scene there would be trouble. I had a notion that the cordon was still tight round the glen and that if I walked in any direction I should meet with questioners.

But get out I must. No man's nerve could stand more than a day of being spied on.

I stayed at my post till about 5 o'clock. By that time I had resolved to go down to Turnbull's cottage at nightfall and take my chance of getting over the hills in the darkness. But suddenly a new car came up the road and slowed down to stop a short distance from me. A fresh wind had risen, and the occupant wanted to light a cigarette.

It was a touring car with the tonneau full of an assortment of baggage. One man sat in it, and by an amazing chance I knew him. His name was Laurence Brown, and he was an old friend of mine. He was a sort of blood stockbroker who did his business by toadying to eldest sons and rich young peers and foolish old ladies.

"Laurence" was a familiar figure. I understood, at balls and polo weeks and country houses. He was an adroit scandal monger, and he was an old friend of mine. He was a sort of blood stockbroker who did his business by toadying to eldest sons and rich young peers and foolish old ladies.

There he showed off at a great rate and pattered about his duchesses till the snobbery of the creature turned me sick. I asked a man afterward why nobody kicked him and was told that Englishmen revered the weaker sex.

Anyhow, there he was now, nattily dressed, in a fine new car, obviously on his way to visit some of his fine friends. A sudden darts took me, and in a second I had jumped into the tonneau and had him by the shoulder.

"Hello, Brown!" I sang out. "Well met, my lad!"

He got a horrid fright. His chin dropped as he stared at me. "Who the devil are you?" he gasped.

"My name's Hannay," I said, "from Rhodessa, you remember."

"Good God—the murderer!" he choked.

"Just so. And there'll be a second murder, my dear, if you don't do as I bid you. Give me that coat of yours. That cap too."

He did as he was bid, for he was blind with terror. Over my dirty trousers and vulgar shirt I put on his smart driving coat, which buttoned up at the top and thereby hid the deficiencies of my collar.

I stuck the cap on my head and added his gloves to my getup. The dusty roadman in a minute was transformed into one of the neatest motorists in Scotland. On Mr. Laurence Brown's head I clapped Turnbull's unspeakable hat, and told him to keep it there.

Then with some difficulty I turned the car. My plan was to go back the road he had come, for the watchers, having seen it before, would let it pass unremarked.

"Now, my child," I said, "sit quite still and be a good boy. I mean you no harm. I'm only borrowing your car for an hour or two. But if you play me any tricks, and above all, if you open your mouth, as sure as there's a God above me I'll wring your neck! Save!"

I enjoyed that evening's ride. We ran eight miles down the valley, through a village or two, and I could not help noticing several strange looking folk lounging by the roadside.

These were the watchers who would have had much to say to me if I had come in from other garb or company. As it was, they looked incuriously on. One

stared at my cap in salute, and I responded graciously.

As the dark fell I turned up a side glen which, as I remembered from the map, led into an unfrequented corner of the hills. Soon the villages were left behind, then the farms and then even the wayside cottages. Presently we came to a lonely moor, where the night was blackening the sunset gleam in the bog pools. Here we stopped, and I obligingly reversed the car and restored to Mr. Laurence Brown his belongings.

"A thousand thanks," I said. "There's more use in you than I thought. Now, be off and find the police."

As I sat on the hillside watching the tall light dwindle I reflected on the various kinds of crime I had now sampled. Contrary to general belief, I was not a murderer, but I had become an unholy liar, a shameless impostor and a highwayman with a marked taste for expensive motorcars.

CHAPTER VIII.
The Bald Archeologist's Adventure.

I SPENT the night on a shelf of the hillside in the lee of a boulder where the heather grew long and soft. It was a cold business, for I had neither coat nor waistcoat. Those were in Mr. Turnbull's keeping as was Scudder's little book, my watch and, worst of all, my pipe and tobacco pouch. Only my money accompanied me in my belt and about half a pound of ginger biscuits in my trouser pocket.

(To Be Continued.)

Judge J. Sheldon Frost, a prominent attorney of Albany, was appointed general counsel for the State Executive Department.

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